

SERVICE LEARNING TOOLS

Exploration
Note-taking
Journals
Readings
Team Binders
Daily De-brief

BRIEF SUMMARIES OF SERVICE LEARNING TOOLS

Exploration: This technique is designed to create a context for the service work which members are completing by helping them to learn about the substance and setting of their projects. Explorations challenge members to ask and then answer a number of questions about the agency and neighborhood where the service project is taking place. Members also find answers to questions about the larger social issue(s) they confront in their service work. The team will use a variety of methods (from reading to interviewing and observation) to eventually become experts on the service they are completing.

Note-taking: Each member will keep a notebook in which they will record important points from team meetings and presentations. Members will be taught basic practices for taking notes and will take notes during workshops and team meetings with service partners and community members.

Journals: Journals provide members with an opportunity to reflect in written form about some of the larger questions and issues which arise in their service work.

Readings: Readings serve as a kind of common ground to which members can bring their perspectives about the various issues which they confront in their service. Readings will relate directly to the kind of service teams are currently performing.

Project Binders: Teams will be able to record and document the development, completion and evaluation of their service work in project binders. Binders will serve as an opportunity for the team to think critically about their work in progress and provide materials for evaluating the project at its conclusion.

Daily De-brief: At the conclusion of each work day, members will evaluate the quality of their service, teamwork and learning on a scale of 1 to 5. This will keep the team focused on their goals in the field and allow them to think about ways to constantly improve.

DETAILED DESCRIPTIONS OF SERVICE LEARNING TOOLS

THE EXPLORATION

The basic tool for Power Inquiry is the exploration which involves answering basic questions about the neighborhood where you serve, the agency you are serving, and the various social issues you may be confronting in your service work. This first activity contains a few preliminary questions which you should try to answer during your first week of service. Each member of your team can take responsibility for finding the answers to two of these questions by the end of the week using whatever methods or tools you can think of. Since you will probably not have time to visit a library, think creatively about other tools you can use to answer the questions: people who work at the agency, residents of the neighborhood, just looking around, etc. In the following weeks, members of the team should come up with their own sets of questions which the team will answer. Answers should be written down with the questions in the team binder. Eventually, you will all become experts about the agency and neighborhood where you serve and the issues you confront in your service.

BASIC NEIGHBORHOOD QUESTIONS

- Who lives in the neighborhood where the project is? What nationalities, races, or classes are well-represented?
- How was the neighborhood formed? Is it part of the city? If so, how long has it been part of the city?
- How has the population of the neighborhood changed over the last fifty years?
- What are the major issues confronting the neighborhood today? What are residents most concerned about? Have the residents of the neighborhood organized around any particular issues?
- What role does violence play in the neighborhood?
- How does this neighborhood differ from others you have been visited in this city?
- How can a team serve in this neighborhood without seeming like intruders?

THE AGENCY EXPLORATION

BASIC AGENCY QUESTIONS

- What is the central mission of the organization? Why was it created? When was it founded? Has the mission changed since its founding?
- What is the relationship between the organization and the community it serves? How was this relationship developed? Where is the staff of the organization from? Are they from the community?
- Who runs the organization? How big is its staff?
- Where does its funding come from?
- How many people does the organization serve?
- How does the organization differ from other, similar types of agencies you are familiar with (other urban gardening or community-based non-profits?)
- What is the real value of the service your team will provide for the organization? How are you helping the agency achieve its mission?

THE ISSUE EXPLORATION

BASIC ISSUE QUESTIONS

- What is the primary issue you are confronting in your service?
- What kind of attention does your issue receive from the Federal government?
- How have the problems associated with your issue changed over the last ten years?
- Does the agency's work draw more attention to this issue? If so, what methods does it use?
- How do you think you could best make a difference in this issue area in the long term?

- How would you guess your team could have valuable contact with the people who are most affected by this issue?

NOTE TAKING

JOURNALS

Journal keeping will prompt members to look more deeply at their service experience and offer a vehicle for them to wrestle with some of the larger issues and questions they confront in their work.

- The team leader should set aside a total of one hour per week (10-15 minutes per day) for journal writing. It might be useful to incorporate this time into the daily debrief.
- Naturally, members should be encouraged to write in their journals at other times too.
- In the first journal writing times, team leaders should provide some structure for the members to work from (particularly since many will have never kept a journal before). For example, have the members respond (in prose, poetry, song, drawing, collage) to either a topic of their own choice or answer a question the team leader (or, later, another team member) will ask. Team leaders might ask questions which deal with:

Specific team experiences: "How did you feel when we first entered the vacant lot to meet with our project sponsor?"

Awareness Issues: "How do you work in someone else's neighborhood without seeming like an intruder?" "How do you serve someone without hurting their pride?"

Comparison: "How does this neighborhood differ from yours or others you have been in?"

Analysis: "What did you learn from our work in the garden today?"

Superlatives: "What surprised you the most about working in this neighborhood?" "What was the most meaningful experience you had today?"

Values: "How important will service be in your life after this summer?"

Every member should be assigned to work with another member during journal writing time. The purpose of journal partners is to:

- **Create stronger relationships within the team.**
 - **Facilitate the reflection process.**
 - **Make sure those members with differing communication skills have an opportunity to work together. One member might be a great artist while another might be a good writer.**
- Journals will contain various types of materials. Though the development of strong written skills is important for all members, the journal writing program should be exciting and interesting to everyone regardless of education level. This will be achieved partially by pairing up corps members, but it will also be obtained by encouraging cm's to try non-written forms of reflection: drawings, photos, collages, collecting items from projects, music, and so forth.
 - The team leader will collect the journals every two weeks and write brief comments to the members on what they have written. The comments will be positive rather than corrective or critical.

USING READINGS

Readings are just one of the many kinds of materials the team can use in reflection — others being music, photographs, drawings, and objects. The idea behind using these materials is to provide not only a spur to discussion, reflection, and learning; but also to serve as a kind of common ground to which the members of the team can bring their diverse perspectives and experiences. The team leader and members of the team can choose materials for discussion. However, a number of materials will be provided for them. Most of these materials will be short stories, articles, poems or photos. Below is a short activity built around two quotes which will help to give an idea of how outside materials might be used for reflection and discussion:

"What do we live for if it is not to make life less difficult for each other?"

— George Eliot (1819 - 1880), pen name of English novelist Mary Ann Evans.

***"Powerful is not he who knocks the other down,
Indeed powerful is he who controls himself in a fit of anger."***

— Quran (Muslim Holy Book)

Some things you may want to think about or discuss:

- 1) Which quote means the most to you? Why? If neither mean anything to you, why?
- 2) Do you agree or disagree with the quotes above?
- 3) What does it mean to you to "make life less difficult for each other?"
- 4) Do you agree with the Quran (Koran) that it is powerful to control oneself in a fit of anger?

TEAM EXPLORATION

Team explorations can be completed at the beginning of new service projects. Variations on this activity can also be completed at different stages within service projects if the team decides it would be useful. The goal of team explorations is to help members gain a better sense of the different perspectives and backgrounds which each person on the team brings to the service work. Team explorations will also help members to become more aware of their own thinking about the service work.

Activity Description

Team Pairs

Take about ten minutes to have members of the team pair up and discuss some or all the following questions (note: this can also be done as a version of concentric circles):

- Did you ever visit this neighborhood before the beginning of this service project? Why or why not?
- What do you think of when you think of this neighborhood?
- Have any of the ideas you had about this neighborhood changed since the team began working here?
- Had you ever heard of the agency where we are working before this year?
- Have you ever worked with or been associated with agencies which are similar to the one we are working in (e.g. if it is a homeless shelter, perhaps you have spent time in homeless shelters in the past)? If so, what similarities or differences do you notice?
- Have you ever done work on the issue(s) which your service project is primarily concerned with (e.g. homelessness if you are working in a homeless shelter, urban green space if you are working in a community garden, etc.)
- Describe a learning experience which was valuable to you (this might be a class you took, a job you had, time you spent with a friend, a book you read, a movie you saw, a religious service you attended). Explain what it was that made the experience valuable.
- How do you think you learn best (by reading in a book, by example, working with someone one-on-one, a lecture, by doing)?

Take a few minutes to have people share their answers to the different questions. The person facilitating the discussion should try to emphasize the range of backgrounds and perspectives which people bring to the work. Ask the team how they think this diversity can be used as a strength in completing the service work. You also may want to ask what might be some of the challenges which this diversity presents. The activity is also designed to help people think about and question any preconceptions they may have had before the service work began.

THE PROJECT BINDER

Below are the components of a project binder:

Although there will be great variation among team projects with respect to mission, service partners, duration, nature of the work, etc., all project binders will have a core set of materials and information which are the same for all projects. These materials would include the following:

- 1) Binder Overview and Contents Page: Anyone opening a complete binder should be able to have an immediate sense of where different materials can be located in an organized table of contents.
- 2) Project Summary: A brief, narrative summary of the goals of the service project, the content of the work, the mission of the service partner and the team's relationship to the partner and the community.
- 3) Project Mission/Background: This section will include a fuller statement of the purpose of the project written by the team, the project's briefing document and background information on the service partner (including literature from the agency and any relevant information on its past relationship with your program).
- 4) Training Descriptions: Trainings prior to and during the project might include orientations to tool safety and use, working with the agency's clients (children, elderly, disabled), and getting to better know the neighborhood in which work is taking place. Information, materials and summaries of these trainings will be included in this section.
- 5) Service Learning: Descriptions of opportunities for service learning during the project, activities undertaken, articles, curricula (including those which may have been developed for service partner's clients), and any other materials used for learning during the project.
- 6) Research and Development: Time frames for planning, training, outreach, implementation and evaluation should be outlined. Schedules, meeting agendas, briefing documents, lists of resources used in planning (people, organizations, services) and any event itineraries will also be included.

7) Project Texts: If the team developed or used any workshops or lesson plans, they will be included and/or referenced.

8) Participation Documentation: The team will record participation levels in after school programs or workshops they run as well as numbers of rooms painted, housing units renovated, lots cleaned, etc.

9) Evaluation: Service partner (and their clients if they have them) will evaluate the team's work. Corps and staff will also evaluate the service work and include written narratives or other reports on the work done.

10) Key Lessons Learned: List of key lessons learned by members during all phases of project planning and implementation. Anecdotes and stories from the project should also be included.

11) Additional sections: The team should feel free to include any additional sections which they believe would enhance the project binder.

Documentation Baselines

- Every member of the team must be involved in the development of the binder.
- The binder must be developed throughout the project instead of being compiled all at the last minute.
- All materials in binders should be neat (no frayed or wrinkled edges, paste-ins should not be sloppy or sticking out beyond the edges of the binder, xeroxes should be crisp rather than blurry or grainy, documents should be formatted consistently).
- Approximately five minutes will be set aside each day to see what items from that day's work need to be added to the binder.

THE DAILY DEBRIEF

- At the end of each day, the team leader (and later members of the team) will take about ten minutes to have the team form a strong circle.
- The TL will then ask the team to rate the *quality of the service work* the team completed that day on a scale of one to five (five = best work).
- Some members of the team should briefly explain why they voted the way they did. The same votes should then be taken on the *teamwork* (how did we work together as a team today?) and the *learning* (how well did we take advantage of learning opportunities today?) for the day.
- The goal of this exercise is to get members of the team to take personal responsibility for the quality of service, teamwork, and learning which happens each day. This will result in strengthening the quality of all three.
- The TL or another member of the team should keep a running tally of how the team votes each day with a brief summary of the team's comments.

- Though all evaluations should always be as honest as possible, corps members should be urged to be particularly uninhibited in these evaluations, since they are solely for the team's use and growth.